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OSCEOLA



The Byrds in South Carolina? Tom Priddy, along with Roger McGuinn, discuss the group's new style on page 12.

Mooney's game plan for District One

by Randal Ashley

Mooney Player stood at the dimly-lit podium at the Oak Ridge Club's outdoor pavilion, speaking quietly in the football idioms that come comfortably to him.

"We have a lot of problems in our schools that we just aren't tackling head-on. We're still playing a running game. With your support, our movement is going to do something about the deterioration in our schools. We are not a parents' group, we are a movement and we've got a seven-month war ahead of us," the Lower Richland High School coach told a group of about 150 people.

Cars continued to turn off the four-lane Sumter highway and waddle down the short dirt road past the "Private Club" sign to parking spaces among the trees as Player spoke. Wives and young men in Lower Richland football jerseys handed mimeographed sheets to dark figures approaching the light of the pavilion. Latecomers hung back at the edges, dividing their attention between sheets titled "Re-Deadline '72" and "QUE-Deadline '72" and Coach Player's valiant-underdog pep talk.

"It's going to be an uphill fight," Player said, "but we've got a -- well, a fair chance. We're going to have to beat the intellectuals. We're going to have to beat the power structure. We're going to go slow -- slowly and with strength."

Such talk of girding for the noble battle brought response from the middle class crowd that filled the backless benches.

These people were frustrated. They felt they had been left out of the decision-making concerning their children's education and they oppose many of the things happening in the schools.

"Thank you, Mooney," one woman said as Player strolled among the crowd at the end of the meeting. An elderly gentleman with a cane and feathered hat said he "found out you (Player) know something besides football." Several people filled out "Que-Deadline '72", a questionnaire and membership form, and perhaps gave their "average donation of \$25 or whatever you can." They were glad to be on "Mooney's team."

Player was fulfilling his role -- and doing it with relish. He had become a center of attention when students accused him of allowing a minor incident at Lower Richland to build racial fights that resulted in all Richland County District One schools closing for two days in early March. Some black students said Player allowed his football players to start a fight that provoked the incident.

The Black Coalition for Justice in the Schools, charging that conscious or subconscious racism was the underlying cause of the disturbances, listed the firing of Player as one of its seven demands to the District One board of trustees.

For his part, Player charged that the incident at Lower Richland "came about because a mob of students with riot-like emotions were incited by a group of well-prepared leaders" and talked of leaving

public education if "local administrators are not able to run the schools."

Apparently, Player huddled with a few "responsible citizens of the Lower Richland community" and decided on formation of Deadline '72 as his alternative to leaving school. Forever the coach, Player found a team waiting, looking for instruction and direction.

Columbia's District One schools fully desegregated last fall with the percentages running about 50-50 black to white in all but the elementaries where it was blacks -- 57 per cent, whites -- 43 per cent. Enrollment was 41,066 in 1968-69 but District One lost 922 during the '69-'70 and '70-'71 sessions when they ran the "freedom of choice" option plan. January 29, 1971, statistics show whites with a narrow 932-student lead at 20,538 to the blacks' 19,606.

Coming back in August with a new zoning plan modeled on HEW's "non-racially identifiable school" guidelines, black enrollment maintained a steady 19,630 to jump to a commanding 2,433-student lead as white enrollment dropped 3,341 from the previous year to a 17,197 mark by a Jan. 21, 1972, count. Zones will remain basically the same for the '72-'73 sessions and it remains to be seen whether the whites will make a comeback.

But statistics don't tell the whole story. Consider the performances of a white mother during the March disturbances telling her friend over an S&S lunch, "We let them come to our schools; what else do they want?" Or the students who prefer the red,

black and green of black nationalism to school colors, and the white students who had to go to the principal's office for "counseling" after they were seen holding hands with blacks of the opposite sex.

Students now are going to school in a completely new environment. Whites and blacks have never been in such constant social contact and they have few places to turn for credible counseling on the matter. Students are very much the pathfinders in learning to adjust to a new social context. Some methods they have tried have been very successful. "Rap sessions" and human relations workshops, often initiated and run by students, have been gushingly praised in the newspapers as if it were an amazing occurrence that people can work out problems by frankly talking together.

Sam McGregor, a District One school board member and "as good a fellow as I know" according to Mooney Player, described the situation when he told "Concerned Citizens of Lower Richland" that the schools are bringing about a unitary society. Quoted in "The State," McGregor said, "We put the burden on our schools and they are not supposed to bear this kind of burden." That statement is the unspoken opinion that makes Deadline '72 a "movement."

Most whites have accepted school desegregation. Local newspapers have finally abandoned the "separate but equal" editorials that were so prevalent a few years

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